Afghanistan, 480 displaced people died as a result of cold in late January 2001. Unless the international community increases assistance significantly, the consequences could be severe.

USCR senior policy analyst Hiram A. Ruiz visited Afghanistan and Pakistan in January 2001 to assess the situation of Afghan refugees, returnees, and displaced persons. Following are USCR's principal findings.

Pakistan (New Refugees):

- A new refugee influx began in June 2000 and accelerated rapidly in October following heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan. Although new Afghan refugees trickle steadily into Pakistan during most years, the refugees who began arriving in June represented the beginning of the largest influx in four years. UNHCR estimates that more than 150,000 Afghan refugees have entered Pakistan since early 2000.

- Most of the refugees are members of ethnic minorities, mainly Tajiks from Takhar and Parwan provinces, and Uzbeks and Turkomans from throughout northern Afghanistan. Some of the new arrivals are also Pashtuns, primarily from areas north of Kabul. In the past, relatively few members of ethnic minorities had gone to Pakistan as refugees. Most of the two million official Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the one million-plus other Afghans living there without documentation are Pashtuns, many of whom share the political and cultural values of the also mostly Pashtun Taleban.

- As of late January 2001, some 60,000 refugees were living in Shamshatoo camp, south of Peshawar. More than 30,000 were located in Baluchistan, Sind, and Punjab provinces and in urban areas of North West Frontier Province (NWFP), particularly in Peshawar city. As many as 75,000 others (many of these possibly not new arrivals) were in Jalozai transit camp north of Peshawar.

- Although Pakistan officially closed its border to new Afghan refugees on November 9, an estimated 70 Afghan refugee families per day continue to enter Pakistan. They enter by through isolated locations or bribing guards at the main border crossing on the Jalalabad-Peshawar road. The Pakistani authorities have started to take measures to prevent this entry and have reportedly used force on several occasions to prevent Afghans from entering. Local authorities in NWFP have begun to round up and deport hundreds of undocumented Afghans living there. UNHCR estimates that an additional 50,000 refugees could enter in the near future, especially in the spring when mountain passes closed by snow begin to re-open.

- The government of Pakistan has also repeatedly asked the Taleban to prevent Afghans from reaching the border, which on occasion the Taleban has done. Pakistan and the Taleban have periodically asked the international community to set up camps inside Afghanistan for would-be refugees. UN and other agencies have been reluctant to comply because this could prevent would-be refugees from seeking refuge in Pakistan.

- UNHCR believes that the hardening attitudes of the Pakistan government and of the Pakistani people toward Afghan refugees may not change any time soon.

Pakistan (Conditions for The Refugees):

- Many of the new arrivals spent months internally displaced in Afghanistan before proceeding to Pakistan. A large majority sold everything they had to survive and make the journey to Pakistan. Consequently they have arrived with few resources or possessions and have little to go back to.

- The large-scale influx began in June. Most new refugees made their way to Jalozai camp, which became a de facto transit camp. Among those entering the camps in June and then in larger numbers beginning in October were refugees who had arrived months before but had been staying with friends or relatives in Peshawar or other towns. Little assistance was available at Jalozai and conditions were said to be poor.

- In late September, UNHCR transferred most of the refugees then at Jalozai to Shamshatoo, a former refugee camp it had re-opened in April to house new arrivals. Within weeks, however, thousands more refugee families were in Jalozai asking to be transferred to Shamshatoo. UNHCR did not have funds to move them to Shamshatoo and assist them there. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) did what they could to help, but conditions at Jalozai deteriorated.

- In October, UNHCR allocated $1 million from its operational reserve to assist new arrivals. It soon began transferring the second batch of new arrivals at Jalozai to Shamshatoo.

- At Shamshatoo, UN agencies and NGOs have provided the refugees tents, built latrines, distributed food, and made medical care available. Nevertheless, according to UNHCR, conditions there are "not satisfactory yet."

- Lack of water is a major problem at Shamshatoo. UNHCR had estimated that Shamshatoo had enough water for 5,000 families, but by January there were more than 10,000 families were living there. UNHCR has tried to identify other sites for new refugees, but the Pakistan authorities have not approved them.

- USCR interviewed a number of refugees at Shamshatoo. Some said they had fled to Pakistan to escape the conflict; others said they were victims of the drought. Some were in Pakistan for the first time, while some had been refugees in Pakistan before, had repatriated to Afghanistan, but had come back because of the drought or fighting.

Pakistan (New Crisis at Jalozai):

- In late January, within days of UNHCR's completing the transfer of the last of the new refugees at Jalozai to Shamshatoo, there were another 12,000 Afghan families (some 50,000 to 60,000 people) at Jalozai transit center. The speed of the influx suggests that some or many of these families may not be new arrivals, but rather needy refugees from among the 1.2 million Afghans living in refugee villages or the more than 2 million other Afghans living in cities and towns throughout Pakistan, especially Peshawar. (At the request of the government of Pakistan, UNHCR has never assisted refugees in urban centers, and for several years UNHCR and WFP have not provided food aid to the Afghans living in refugee villages, considering most of the refugees there to be self-sufficient. That has resulted in at least some of the refugees living in marginal conditions.)

- UNHCR recently began a verification process to identify actual new arrivals in the group in order to move them to Shamshatoo, but the government of Pakistan asked UNHCR to halt it.

- Once again, conditions in Jalozai are grossly inadequate, with little or no sanitation, and a lack of water, shelter, and medical care. A UNHCR spokesperson said that the size of the new influx is "overwhelming" aid agencies. Another UNHCR official said that if many of the people now in Jalozai are "old" refugees, they must be in great need to have moved there. He told Agence France

Presse, "The very fact that they are exposing themselves and their children to these conditions means that they are desperate."

Afghanistan (Internally Displaced and Drought-Affected Persons) :

- Conflict and drought have led an estimated 350,000 Afghans to become internally displaced in recent months. A major Taleban offensive that led to its capture of Taloqan in September also caused tens of thousands of civilians to flee. Since then, fighting has continued sporadically in some areas of the north. The current drought is the most severe to hit Afghanistan in 30 years and has affected most areas of the country.

- According to the Office of the UN Coordinator for Afghanistan, almost 100,000 people are displaced in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces, many as a result of conflict. Another 100,000 displaced persons are in Mazar-e-Sharif and nearby areas. These include more than 46,000 people displaced by fighting in late 2000 in Kunduz and Baghlan provinces. Some 80,000 displaced people are in Herat, western Afghanistan's largest city, and another 70,000 Afghans are newly displaced in southern Afghanistan.

- Among those displaced in Takhar Province are some 10,000 persons who fled the fighting in August and September who are stranded on several islands in a river along the Afghan/Tajik border. They suffer periodic attacks by the Taleban and receive little assistance because their location is accessible only Tajikistan. UNHCR has repeatedly appealed to the Tajik government to permit the refugees to enter. However, in contravention of international law, Tajikistan has consistently refused them entry.

- The Taleban authorities have done little to respond to drought-affected Afghans' humanitarian needs. Although members of the Taleban's Ministry of Martyrs and Refugees (MRR) are active in the coordination of relief activities in most localities and sometimes help provide security, they rarely contribute resources to the relief effort. The Taleban appears committed to devoting all of its available resources to its war effort and seems to leave humanitarian relief for those affected by the war and by drought to the international community.

Afghanistan (Displaced Persons in Herat): √C

- Displaced persons began arriving in Herat in June, but the numbers did not escalate dramatically until September. Most of the displaced are from Badgis, Faryab, and Ghor provinces, and are rural people who either had small plots of land or worked as tenant farmers on others' lands. According to one UN report, to get to Herat, many of the displaced sold "their last remaining assets, including their agricultural implements, livestock, and draft animals."

- By late January 2001, more than 80,000 persons had arrived in Herat in search of food. Some 50 displaced families continue to arrive in Herat daily, and the number of displaced there is expected to exceed 100,000 in February. The displaced in Herat are housed in six camps. The largest, Maslagh—the only camp receiving new arrivals—holds more than 32,000 people.

- The relief effort has been inadequate. Leadership and coordination were lacking in the early months, and many of the organizations attempting to assist the displaced struggled because they lacked funds. Consequently, conditions in the camps are poor, with inadequate shelter and blankets, little sanitation, no apparent site planning, and uneven food distribution. Nevertheless, at the time of

USCR's visit, there were no reports of widespread malnutrition. WFP and NGOs were providing wet feeding for children in the camps to supplement the dry rations that WFP distributes.

- Beginning in December, coordination improved, as have conditions in some camps, but at Maslagh in particular they remain inadequate, in large part due to a lack of funds. WFP has warned that it has only enough food to feed the displaced in Herat through February. If it does not receive additional food quickly, it will have to suspend food distribution.

- In late January 2001, a sudden cold snap hit Herat. Temperatures fell to -13° F (-25° C). The cold killed more than 480 displaced persons, mainly children and elderly people, between January 29 and January 31. According to a January 31 report by the Office of the UN Coordinator for Afghanistan (OCHA), "Lack of proper shelter, blankets, and fuel can be assumed to have contributed the high death rate in the camps." The OCHA regional representative in Herat said he was frustrated because the situation "has gradually grown worse, despite repeated appeals for more resources."

- The displaced in Herat (and other urban areas) have little opportunity to find work. Consequently, the UN says, they are likely to "constitute an unusually highly dependent population." It adds, "This level of dependency will continue and will be exacerbated and prolonged, for many, by inability to return home."

- The probable effects of the drought in Afghanistan have been known for many months. A UN report issued in August 2000 said, "At least half the population of Afghanistan may be affected by drought, including three to four million severely affected and another eight to twelve million moderately [affected].... The drought has cost the loss of 90 percent of crops in the majority of rain-fed areas."

- WFP and other aid groups undertook efforts to provide food aid in many areas of Afghanistan, and it is apparent that in areas where they distributed food, most people were able to remain at home. However, aid groups did not have enough food or logistical capacity to reach all the areas in need. Many of those who left their homes in search of food are from areas that aid agencies were unable to reach.

- Although some of the people who have not left their homes may have remained because they had some resources to see them through, others did not leave because they lacked the resources to make the journey to Herat. The situation of people in this latter category is particularly difficult. Various aid groups and visitors to northern Afghanistan in particular have reported acute malnutrition and high death rates among children. Even before the drought, as many as one quarter of Afghan children in some areas, including Kabul, showed signs of malnutrition. Health care in Afghanistan is extremely poor, and the country has one of the three highest rates of infant and maternal mortality in the world.

- WFP says that before the drought it was providing food aid through various programs to more than 1.5 million Afghans. Since the effects of the drought became evident in mid-2000, it has nearly doubled its number of beneficiaries.

- The drought threatens to continue through 2001. Until the late January cold-snap, there had been little snow (melting snow irrigates much of Afghanistan in the spring). If the drought continues, much more food than is currently available or in the pipeline may be required for the displaced—and those still at home in severely affected areas—to survive.

- But even with good rains, most farmers would be unable to plant because they had to eat their seed supplies of seeds to survive. Finding sufficient seeds that are agriculturally appropriate for the region is another major challenge.

Afghanistan (Returnees from Iran)

- On February 14, 2000, UNHCR and Iran signed an agreement in which Iran agreed to permit undocumented Afghans living in Iran to apply for asylum or return voluntarily to Afghanistan. Those requesting asylum undergo a screening process carried out by the Iranian authorities in conjunction with UNHCR. If they are determined to be refugees, they are permitted to remain legally in Iran. If rejected, they are deported to Afghanistan.

- UNHCR agreed to the program in part to discourage Iran from forcibly deporting Afghans without any screening or assistance, which the Iranian authorities had been regularly doing. In Herat, USCR met a number of returnees who had participated in the voluntary return program. Some said they had applied voluntarily to return to avoid deportation and take advantage of the aid package. Others said that they had been rounded up at their worksites and told either to immediately return under the program or be deported. Some said that because they were obliged to leave immediately, their families got left behind in Iran.

- UNHCR and WFP provided participants in the repatriation program an aid package consisting of a cash grant of $40, a set quantity of wheat per person, and non-food items such as agricultural tools. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided the returnees transportation to their home areas in Afghanistan. Approximately half the returnees were from Herat Province.

- UNHCR had limited funds to implement the program and consequently provided little further assistance to the returnees. In some areas with large numbers of returnees, it provided returnees shelter material and assisted communities to repair irrigation systems. Only a small minority of the returnees benefited from these programs, however. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) implemented various U.S.-government funded re-integration projects in some areas with a large numbers of returnees, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also implemented some programs for returnees. Most returnees, however, were left to fend for themselves upon return.

- The voluntary return program began on April 9 and continued through December 7. Altogether, 133,397 Afghans repatriated through the program. The program ended one month earlier than expected because UNHCR ran out of funds.

Afghanistan (impact of UN sanctions):

- Even as the UN, governments, NGOs, and others struggle to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Afghan civilians, in December 2000, the UN, spurred by the United States and Russia, voted to impose additional sanctions on Afghanistan (the UN first imposed sanctions on Afghanistan in November 1999).

- The sanctions are intended to punish the Taleban for continuing to harbor Osama bin Laden, whom the U.S. government accuses of masterminding terrorist attacks against U.S. targets, and for permitting the presence of so-called terrorist bases on Afghan soil. The sanctions seek to stop the flow of arms to the Taleban.

- The United States has said that the sanctions are "political, not economic," and that "trade and commerce, including in food and medicine, continue unabated."

- Nevertheless, the new sanctions are likely to exacerbate Afghan civilians' suffering. They will further strain relations between the Taleban and UN agencies and NGOs, which could put the lives of UN and NGO staff at risk or cause their withdrawal from Afghanistan, which would cripple relief efforts.

- Even though the sanctions are being imposed by the United Nations, UN agencies involved in the relief effort have expressed concern about them. An OCHA report on the humanitarian impact of the 1999 sanctions said that these "had a tangible negative effect on the Afghan economy and on the ability of humanitarian agencies to render assistance to people in the country." The report added that many individual Afghans feel victimized by the sanctions, believing that the UN "has set out to harm rather than help Afghans."

- One example of the effects of the sanctions was their impact on Afghanistan's Ariana Airlines. The sanctions prohibited Ariana from landing on UN member states' territories. Pakistan and India banned Ariana flights, even though these carried much needed commodities, particularly medical supplies and medical equipment, to Afghanistan.

- In the closing months of its Administration, besides successfully promoting additional UN sanctions against Afghanistan, the Clinton White House considered additional air strikes against what it identified as terrorist bases in Afghanistan. It is not clear what the Bush Administration's position on this will be.

Regional Assistance Needs:

- Before this new emergency, UN agencies were struggling to find funds for their programs of assistance to Afghans in need, Afghan refugees, and repatriation and reintegration programs. UNHCR, for example, suspended its (albeit controversial) repatriation program from Iran one month early because it lacked funding. Afghan refugees who have returned from Pakistan and Iran in the past year or two comprise a particularly vulnerable group in Afghanistan, because most had no chance to re-establish themselves economically before the drought hit.

- Donors such as the United States and European Union continue to provide food and to fund on-going projects to benefit at-risk civilians in Afghanistan, Afghan refugees, and repatriation and reintegration programs, but have yet to begin to respond adequately to the new emergency.

- The UN convened a meeting of donor governments in Pakistan on January 11 to appeal for funds for the new refugees as well as for internally displaced Afghans and the Afghan repatriation program. The meeting initially produced little response, which caused the UN agencies significant concern.

- Following the deaths of 480 refugees from cold in Herat in late January 2001, OCHA noted than among the needs presented to donors at the January 11 meeting was a request for $3.5 million for non-food items such as shelter, blankets, and clothing. It noted that donors had only contributed $200,000 toward those needs. UN agencies have scheduled another meeting with donors on February 8 to again appeal for funding for their emergency programs in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- UN agencies and NGOs involved in the relief programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan believe that if the drought continues, widespread starvation could result in some areas of Afghanistan unless there is a substantial increase in international aid.

- In December, WFP requested 12,400 metric tons of food (equivalent to $4.8 million) for emergency food aid to new Afghan refugees in Pakistan. It has yet to receive any pledges toward this urgent request.

- WFP will soon be requesting more than 170,000 metric tons of food (equivalent to $80 million) for emergency food assistance for drought and conflict-affected Afghans in the coming year.

- UNHCR has requested $3.5 million to respond to new arrivals in Pakistan. It recently received a U.S. government pledge of $1 million but it was not certain if this pledge was for UNHCR's response to new arrivals in Pakistan or for the Afghans stranded at the Tajik border. So far, the EU has not made a direct pledge toward UNHCR's appeal, though it has pledged $300,000 for a project to improve the water supply in Shamshatoo through a European NGO.

USCR Recommendations:

- The overarching need in both Afghanistan and Pakistan at the moment is for substantially more international assistance. Refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons, drought-affected persons in their own homes–all are at risk. UN agencies and relief groups have sounded the alarm: without a major international effort to assist these populations, a humanitarian tragedy could occur. <u>The international community should respond quickly and generously to at-risk Afghans' emergency needs.</u>

- USCR calls on the U.S. government to take the lead in responding to this most recent Afghan crisis. The United States has a long history with Afghanistan and Afghan refugees. It has many legitimate grievances with the Taleban, including its treatment of women and its harboring of groups that the U.S. government accuses of having carried out terrorist acts against it. Those grievances have not prevented the United States from providing humanitarian aid to the Afghan people. This new crisis calls for an even greater humanitarian response. If the United States takes the lead and responds generously to UN and NGO appeals for funds to tackle this crisis, other donors governments may follow. <u>We strongly urge the Bush Administration to make such a humanitarian response one of its first foreign policy actions.</u>

- While the international community should do its part, the Taleban authorities and Afghanistan's neighbors must also do theirs. It is unconscionable that the Taleban devotes all its available resources to pursuing its military aims while doing virtually nothing to assist its vulnerable civilian population. The Taleban seeks recognition as Afghanistan's ruling government. <u>If it wants such recognition, the Taleban should begin by taking responsibility for responding to the crisis affecting its citizens</u>.

- It is understandable that Pakistan and Iran are weary of hosting Afghan refugees and do not want more to enter. During the past two decades, these two countries have hosted the largest refugee populations in the world (Tajikistan has no such record). The international community should work to minimize the refugees' impact on Pakistan and Iran and encourage and support repatriation when that becomes possible. However, <u>Pakistan and Iran must continue to honor internationally agreed upon principles of refugee protection and permit Afghan asylum seekers to enter.</u>

- Tajikistan has not experienced large Afghan refugee flows in the past. Although Tajikistan suffers many internal problems, these do not excuse its failure to offer refuge to a group of only 10,000 people whose lives are clearly at risk. Concerns about armed fighters among the group can be addressed by screening the population upon entry and separating armed fighters from the majority civilian population. Tajikistan should immediately grant refuge to the 10,000 Afghans stranded at its border.

- The United States, which worked closely with Russia to convince the UN to impose further sanctions on the Taleban, should urge the Russian authorities (whose troops control the Tajik/Afghan border) to press Tajikistan to permit Afghan refugees to enter.

- The United Nations should ensure that the second round of sanctions it has imposed on Afghanistan does not contribute to the humanitarian crisis or inhibit its own agencies' and others' efforts to respond to the civilian victims of the crisis.

NEWS from the U.S. Committee for Refugees

February 2, 2001
For further information:
Hiram A. Ruiz
(202) 347-3507
hruiz@irsa-uscr.org



AFGHANS IN CRISIS:

- **More than 500,000 Afghans Newly Uprooted;**
- **Pakistan and Tajikistan Deny Afghan Refugees Entry;**
- **Drought Threatens Hundreds of Thousands in Afghanistan;**
- **International Response Falls Far Short of Needs.**

A serious humanitarian catastrophe looms in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. Renewed fighting, the cumulative effects of decades of on-going conflict, and the worst drought to hit Afghanistan in some 30 years have put hundreds of thousands of people at severe risk. As many as 150,000 Afghans have fled to Pakistan, and some 350,000—perhaps many more—are internally displaced throughout Afghanistan. An unknown number may have also fled to other neighboring countries.

Although a large number of Afghans have managed to enter Pakistan and others continue to arrive there daily, Pakistan's border has been officially closed to new refugees since November 9. The government of Pakistan has recently started to take steps to enforce the border closure. On some occasions, Pakistani border guards have beaten refugees at the border to prevent them from entering, and other Pakistan authorities have started to round up and deport Afghans without documentation.

Tajikistan has for several months refused entry to some 10,000 Afghans stranded at its border, despite repeated appeals from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for Tajikistan to grant the group refuge. The Afghans are within shelling distance of Taleban forces and are living in extremely poor conditions because it is difficult for aid agencies to reach them. Iran not only refuses to permit entry to new Afghan refugees, but also pressured UNHCR into facilitating the repatriation of more than 100,000 Afghans from Iran in the year 2000. Many of the former refugees returned to areas affected by conflict and drought and faced severe difficulties reintegrating.

Those who have left their homes at least have a chance of receiving aid. Hundreds of thousands of other Afghans are too poor to leave their homes (having nothing left to sell to pay for transportation), and many could face starvation if aid does not reach them. The World Food Program (WFP) and a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are trying to assist as many of the vulnerable as they can, but they lack the food, personnel, and logistical capacity to reach all the affected areas.

Donor governments have pledged some of the aid that the UN agencies and NGOs have urgently appealed for, but their pledges fall far short of the need. Conditions in camps for internally displaced Afghans and for newly arrived refugees in Pakistan are inadequate. In camps for displaced people in Herat, western